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08/420241

CONCHA HEADSET STABILIZER

Background of the Invention

Field of Invention

The invention relates generally to the design of headsets, and more particularly, to
5 an apparatus for stabilizing such headsets.

Description of the Background Art

A concha style headset is a device for transmitting received sounds to the ear of the user by means of a small receiver which is sized to fit in the lower concha in front of the ear canal. In telecommunication headsets, a tubular extension or a voice tube is
10 often coupled to the receiver and extends down and towards the user's mouth for receiving the user's voice and transmitting it over a telecommunications line. Conventional earbud concha style headsets position the receiver inside the lower concha between the tragus and anti-tragus to establish placement and support on the ear. However, different ear shapes and sizes make it difficult for a single design to both
15 fit the ear correctly and to stabilize the headset. Accordingly, the receiver is typically held in place by mechanical devices which fit around the outside of the ear, or around the head. These devices add mechanical complexity, which decreases ease of use, and increases the cost of manufacturing. Mechanical stabilizers also increase the size and weight of the headset, resulting in increased fatigue from prolonged use.

20 One example of such mechanical stabilizers is the ear hook. An ear hook is a large semicircular component that fits around the top of the ear between the helix and the side of the head. The receiver is then attached to the body of the ear hook, and held in the lower concha in front of the ear canal, or it can be coupled to the receiver with a flexible tube and placed into the lower concha. The ear hook presents three

140 disadvantages. ^{First, an} ear hook is awkward and time ^{consuming} to place on the ear because of the need to manually position the ear hook. ^{consuming} Second, the ear hook does not ensure that the receiver stays in front of the ear canal, resulting in the user having to periodically readjust the ear hook or receiver during usage to correct the placement. 5 Finally, the ear hook requires additional mechanical parts, such as those for adjusting for left and right ears, and different ear sizes. The ear hook and such parts add weight to the headset, increasing fatigue during use, and increasing manufacturing and product costs.

Another common alternative is a headband style headset that locates the receiver in front of the ear canal using a stiff metal band which arches over the top of the head 10 from ear to ear. The headband adds weight and mechanical complexity to the headset, requires both hands to put on and take off, and can take some time to adjust properly.

It would be desirable therefore, to provide an apparatus for stabilizing a concha headset that overcomes the disadvantages of the prior art. In particular, it is desirable to provide a means for stabilizing the headset that adds little weight or mechanical 15 complexity to the headset, thereby reducing manufacturing costs, and increasing usability, and adaptability to existing headsets.

Summary of Invention

A stabilizer for a headset comprises a receiver attachment which couples to the receiver, and a concha stabilizer pad which is secured to the receiver attachment by a 20 flexible supporting member. The concha stabilizer pad engages the upper concha below the antihelix when the receiver is placed in the lower concha between the tragus and antitragus, thereby creating three points of contact at the tragus, the anti-tragus, and the upper concha.

One embodiment of the stabilizer comprises a shaped foam piece which couples 25 onto the receiver of a headset. A portion of the foam piece forms an ear cushion that

covers the receiver, and fits between the tragus and the ~~antitragus~~ ^{antitragus}. Another portion of the foam piece forms a supporting foam member that extends from the top of the ear cushion to a concha stabilizer pad that rests against the upper concha. The supporting member is elongated and flexible, providing a spring hinge-like action which automatically adjusts the stabilizer to the size and shape of the upper concha, while providing sufficient force to hold the receiver against the lower concha.

Alternatively, the stabilizer is formed from an arch that connects to a receiver, and is disposed upward from the receiver. A concha stabilizer pad is secured to the top of the arch and provides a contact point when inserted into the upper concha. The arch is resilient to provide tension to the upper concha through the foam pad, thereby stabilizing the receiver in the ear. The resilient arch can be formed of wire, an elastomeric compound, or the like. In another alternate embodiment the stabilizer is formed as a torus (ring shape) that is coupled to a stalk shaped supporting member.

The simple design and absence of mechanical parts results in several benefits. The concha stabilizer permits fast and easy one-handed insertion and removal, without the need for repeated adjustment. The concha stabilizer maintains the receiver in the lower concha, ensuring proper placement and eliminating the need for frequent readjustment. The concha stabilizer is self-adjusting with no additional mechanical parts, and is symmetrical for either ear. The small form factor increases wearability, and decreases fatigue. Further, manufacturing costs are also reduced. The design of the concha stabilizer is readily adaptable and applicable to a variety of existing headsets which use an ear cushion, thereby allowing use of the present invention with no need for redesign.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Sub B17 ~~Figure 1 is an illustration of the concha stabilizer, with Figure 1B showing a sectional view of the concha stabilizer of Figure 1A,~~

Figure 2A, 2B, and 2C are illustrations of alternate embodiments of a concha
5 stabilizer.

Figure 3 is a pictorial illustration of the human ear, as described in the Appendix.

Description of the Preferred Embodiment

The present invention for stabilizing a concha style headset includes a receiver attachment that couples to the receiver, a flexible stabilizer support member that couples to the receiver attachment and extends away from the receiver attachment and toward the upper concha with the receiver placed in the ear, and a concha stabilizer pad mounted at the end or top of the support member, for contacting the upper concha below the antihelix.

~~Fig 1~~ Figure 1 shows an embodiment of the invention for stabilizing a concha style headset typically including a receiver 27 and a voice tube 30. A receiver attachment comprises an ear cushion 11 preferably dimensioned as an oblate spheroid, formed of a reticulated, fully open-pore flexible, ester type polyurethane foam. A suitable foam is the P100 foam commercially available from Illbruck Inc.. The foam has a density of approximately 1.75 lbs/ft³, provides a minimum restriction to air flow, and is functionally transparent to the transmission of sound from the receiver 27. The ear cushion 11 has an open central recessed portion 13 forming a "C" shape, which is dimensioned to fit snugly onto the receiver 27. When placed into the lower concha 41 (Figure 3), the ear cushion 11 contacts the tragus 35 and the antitragus 39 at a tragus contact point 23 and an antitragus contact point 25, respectively, where the face 15 of the ear cushion 11 rests in the lower concha 41 and faces toward the ear canal 33. The left/right orientation of the tragus contact point 23 and the antitragus contact point 25 with respect to the face 15 of the ear cushion 11 is reversed for the left and right ears.

Extending from the upper surface of the ear cushion 11 is a flexible support member, here a stabilizer support 17. The stabilizer support 17 is an open cell foam which has been compressed to become sufficiently rigid to provide both flexibility for, and resistance to, positional deformation. The foam can be the same as that used for the

10D ear cushion, ~~compressed~~^{compressed} approximately 1.74:1 using ~~conventional~~^{conventional} techniques, yielding an approximate effective density of 9.29 lbs/ft³. The end of the stabilizer support 17 is coupled to a concha stabilizer pad 21 which contacts the upper concha 43 beneath the antihelix 45. ~~The concha stabilizer pad 21 is formed of the same compressed open cell foam as the stabilizer support 17.~~ The stabilizer support 17 can have a uniform width or can taper from the ear cushion 11 toward the concha stabilizer pad 21. Two support ribs 19 are disposed longitudinally along the inner surface of the stabilizer support 17 and extend from the upper surface of the ear cushion 11 to the underside of the concha stabilizer pad 21 to increase the rigidity and durability of the stabilizer support 17. The longitudinal axis of stabilizer support 17 aligns with the longitudinal axis of the voice tube 30. The stabilizer support 17 can be formed out of non-compressed open cell foam if the foam is overmolded to a more rigid material like wire or plastic.

During use, the ear cushion 11 is placed into the lower concha 41, fitting into the intertragic notch 37 between the tragus 35 and the antitragus 39, with the contact points 23, 25 respectively engaged. The user then pushes the stabilizer support 17 into and against the upper concha 43, below the antihelix 45. The outer surface of the concha stabilizer pad 21 provides a concha contact point 24 which contacts the upper concha 43, thereby providing three points of contact for stabilizing the ear cushion 11. The placement action causes the stabilizer support 17 to form a hinge point 28 where the underside of the concha stabilizer pad 21 joins the support rib 19. The cellular foam of the stabilizer support 17 gives the hinge point 28 sufficient angular tension to maintain the concha contact point 24 against the surface of the upper concha 43. The degree of angular flexure of the hinge point 28 is dependent upon the size and shape of the user's ear, particularly the upper concha 43, antihelix 45, and the crux of the helix 31. The hinge action of the hinge point 28, coupled with the general flexibility and resilience of the stabilizer support 17, allows the stabilizer support 17 to automatically adjust to the

14D size and shape of ^{the} ~~the~~ user's upper concha 43 ^{without} ~~without~~ any additional mechanical devices, to properly position the concha stabilizer pad 21.

Figures 2A, 2B, and 2C show three alternative embodiments of the present invention. In all embodiments, the receiver attachment is integral with the support member, and is coupled to a concha stabilizer pad. In the embodiment of Figure 2A the receiver attachment comprises curved members 51a which are dimensioned to curve around the body of the receiver 27. The curved members 51a have retaining members 53a which engage the underside of the receiver 27 in holes adapted to receive such retaining members 53a, thereby securing the curved members 51a to the receiver 27. Integral with, and coupling between the curved members 51a, is a curved support arch 55a which extends upwards and away from the receiver 27. The top portion 59a of the support arch 55a is coupled to a concha stabilizer pad 57a, which functions as described above.

Figure 2B shows another alternative embodiment in which the receiver attachment is formed with only retaining members 53b for mounting in holes in the upper surface of the receiver 27 adapted to receive such retaining members 53b. Integral with, and coupling between the retaining members 53b, is a curved support arch 55b which extends upward and away from the receiver 27. The top portion 59b of the support arch 55b is coupled to a concha stabilizer pad 57b, which functions as described above.

In the embodiments of Figures 2A and 2B the support arch 55 provides the support for the concha stabilizer pad 57, and provides sufficient tension to maintain the concha stabilizer pad 57 against the upper concha 43 during use. In these embodiments the arch 55 and its integral portions 59 and members 53, 55 can be formed of wire, an elastomeric compound, or the like.

100 Figure 2C ^{shows} another alternative ^{embodiment} in which the receiver attachment comprises the end portion 53c of a compressed foam support stalk 55c, which can be also made of a rigid plastic material. Along the length of the support stalk 55c are support ribs 61c which increase the rigidity and durability of the support stalk 55c. The end portion 53c is inserted into a hole in the upper surface of the receiver 27 dimensioned to receive the support stalk 55c. At the opposing end of the support stalk 55c is coupled a toriod shaped concha stabilizer pad 57c formed of open cell foam, of the type described above. The toriod shape of the concha stabilizer pad 57c enables the pad to deform and adapt to the shape of the upper concha, thereby maintaining the receiver in position.

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The spirit and scope of the invention is not intended to be limited to the description of the preferred embodiment herein, but is capable of use in other environments or combinations, and is capable of modification or changes within the details of the inventive concept described above. The invention can be used with any concha style headset receiver coupled to any audio source. The headset stabilizer can be used with any headset for personal listening to any audio source device. For example, the invention can be used with headsets typically employed for listening to music, and particularly to headsets used with portable cassette. compact disk players. radios. Accordingly, the invention is limited only by the claims included herein.